

Bureaucracy for salmon is closing in on \$1 billion

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The \$935.5 million in public resources to be spent next year adds new pressure to the debate on fish

By JIM BARNETT
THE OREGONIAN

WASHINGTON — The bureaucracy built to save endangered fish in the Northwest hasn't ended the threat of extinction. But it soon will reach a dubious milestone, consuming nearly \$1 billion in public resources in a single year.

The public effort to save the region's endangered fish has no special name, no headquarters, nobody in charge. Rather, it is the combined, if loosely coordinated, work of six Cabinet-level agencies and four states.

Nobody in the federal government keeps track of exactly how much money is spent saving fish — not even the Office of Management and Budget, the White House office charged with drafting the federal budget each year.

That lack of information has frustrated people on all sides of the debate. At a recent hearing on Capitol Hill, Sen. Larry Craig, R-Idaho, lamented that two decades of human effort had succeeded only in perpetuating itself at untold cost.

"The bureaucracy of salmon rolls on," Craig grumbled wearily.

The estimated cost of fish recovery was developed by The Oregonian with input from each of the federal agencies and states.

The newspaper found \$935.5 million slated to be spent in 2000 on activities ranging from planting streamside trees to removing old logging roads.

When informed of the figure, Craig and other members of Congress from the Northwest expressed surprise.

Sen. Slade Gorton, R-Wash., called it "mind-boggling." Sens. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., and Gordon Smith, R-Ore., said the high cost of fish recovery would be hard to defend on Capitol Hill. "Even in this town, \$1 billion is still real money," Smith said.

◆ The federal government is paying the biggest share of the high cost of fish recovery. The Oregonian's Jim Barnett tallies up what various agencies are spending. News Focus/A8